



# **GENERAL FUND REFERENDUM WITH 82% APPROVAL RATE**

**Hamilton Southeastern Schools  
Dr. Brian Smith, Superintendent**

**Securing support from the community involves the presence of the superintendent and the use of lots of communication strategies, including the use of new media. Some suggestions relating to a referendum appear below.**

1. The approach for a general fund referendum is different than the approach for a building referendum. Also, the strategies for a referendum will vary in each community and each referendum.
2. The community wants to hear from the superintendent, not from the assistants. This is not something that should be delegated.
3. Unless the superintendent is willing to put in the time, he or she is wasting his or her time.
4. Consultants are not always needed to survey the community. The superintendent may be able to gauge what the community will support.
5. Some superintendents get a false impression of what the community will support because they are only meeting with those who are pro-education and who are supportive. It is very important to identify "negative" groups and try to meet with them.
6. In a referendum, it helps to have something for everyone.
7. It is important to work with the PTO groups and ask for their help in getting people to vote.
8. An attempt should be made to meet with all school groups (i.e., musicals, PTO meetings, etc.) while the parents are present to make general comments about the school corporation and to also present the referendum proposal.
9. Presentations should be made to non-involved community groups, such as retired citizens.
10. Getting the staff on-board as a team is critical.
11. The message to the community needs to be extremely clear, passionate, and needs to make sense. You can't stumble with your data.
12. The Chamber of Commerce and business community should be very supportive because "as goes the schools, goes the community."

13. The superintendent will need to fine-tune his or her presentation throughout the referendum.
14. It is important to make sure there are those on the committees who know how to communicate on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The superintendent does not have to have this knowledge, but some on the committee will be invaluable using these skills.
15. It should be explained that the business community and the school corporation have a symbiotic relationship. The businesses in the community will suffer with a school corporation that is not meeting the needs of the children.
16. Superintendents should take advantage of being on the TV camera.
17. Networking with the community throughout the year is important; however, during a referendum, the superintendent needs to contribute as many days and nights needed to network with the community.
18. The school corporation website should have all the pertinent information relating to the referendum, including answers to questions that are being asked in the community.
19. Once referendums begin to fail in a community, families begin moving out of the community.
20. Regarding a referendum concerning facilities, it is recommended that the Facility Planning Committee consist of approximately fifty members. Broad representation from the community is critical.
21. The Political Advisory Committee (PAC) should consist of at least twenty-five members. Additional participation will be invaluable for making phone calls to remind voters to vote.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTE FROM FAIR, INC.**

One community engagement specialist for a large architectural firm recommends the following:

The Steering Committee consists of the chairpersons of all of the subcommittees, plus the PAC chairpersons, and is the strategic group. Typically, the Steering Committee meets one half hour prior to the larger campaign committee to iron out any problems and plan strategy. Then the full PAC, preferably 40 to 50 strong, meet to report, assess, and plan progress.